

Message Text

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FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY

1. DURING JULY 26 CALL ON JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADER TOUTAH AND MAURICE NOSSEIRI TO INTRODUCE NEWTON, WE GAINED IMPRESSION THAT OVERALL CONDITIONS IN SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING SUMMER 1978 ARE CALM, AND RELATIVELY RELAXED AND PROSPEROUS. TOUTAH SAID THERE WAS NO UNEMPLOYMENT IN COMMUNITY; ALL ITS YOUNG MEN WERE WORKING. BOTH SCHOOLS WERE CONDUCTING SUMMER SESSIONS TO KEEP CHILDREN OFF STREETS. THEY WERE WAITING FOR RESULTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS TO DETERMINE HOW MANY STUDENTS WOULD BE ATTENDING DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY NEXT YEAR. JEWISH STUDENTS WOULD BE ADMITTED TO UNIVERSITY FACULTIES ON THE SAME BASIS AS OTHER SYRIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES, TOUTAH SAID.

2. EXCEPT IN AREA OF FOREIGN TRAVEL, TOUTAH DESCRIBED COMMUNITY'S RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT AS COOPERATIVE. FUNDS FROM U.S. FOR SCHOOL AND ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR WERE BEING RECEIVED REGULARLY AND GOVERNMENT WAS APPROVING THEIR TRANSFER THROUGH COMMERCIAL BANK OF SYRIA WITHOUT
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DIFFICULTY OR DELAY. IN ADDITION, COL. MESSAOUD HAD AGREED TO OPEN A LONG-STANDING COMMUNITY COMPLAINT--THAT IT WAS NOT RECEIVING RENTAL PAYMENTS FOR THE SCHOOL /SYNAGOGUE/ HOSTELRY IN DJOBAR, A VILLAGE IN THE DAMASCUS ENVIRONS WHICH WAS TAKEN OVER BY THE PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS OFFICE IN 1948 AND WAS STILL BEING USED AS A SCHOOL AND OFFICE CENTER BY THE PALESTINIANS. MESSAOUD HAD AGREED TO FORMATION OF

A THREE-MEMBER COMMISSION COMPOSED OF TOUTAH, A MEMBER OF THE PALESTINIAN INSTITUTE AND A CHAIRMAN APPOINTED BY MESSAOUD TO STUDY THE RENTAL QUESTION INCLUDING PAST RENTALS DUE. TOUTAH HAD FORMED A SUBSIDIARY COMMITTEE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY TO ASSIST HIM IN MAKING EVALUATIONS, ETC. HE SAW FORMATION OF THIS COMMISSION AS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

3. TOUTAH SAID THAT SYRIANS HAD GIVEN A COMMUNITY MEMBER A SIX MONTH MULTIPLE-ENTRY PASSPORT TO MAKE REGULAR VISITS TO THE LEBANESE COMMUNITY TO PERFORM RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES, BUTCHERING, CIRCUMCISIONS, ETC. HIS REGULAR VISITS TO BHAMDOUN (BECAUSE MOST LEBANESE JEWS HAD HAD LEFT BEIRUT FOR THE MOUNTAIN) HAD BEEN TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED BY THE COMMUNITY BECAUSE OF RENEWED FIGHTING IN THE BEIRUT AREA.

4. ISSUANCE OF PASSPORTS FOR FOREIGN TRAVEL CONTINUED TO BE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED, TOUTAH SAID, AND ADDED THAT MANY MORE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WISHED TO TRAVEL ABROAD THIS SUMMER THAN IN THE PAST. MESSAOUD WAS KEEPING LIMITS ON THE NUMBERS ALLOWED TO BE ABROAD AT ANY ONE TIME, HOWEVER, AND WAS INSISTING THAT TOUTAH HIMSELF SPONSOR OR GUARANTEE THE APPLICATIONS IN ABOUT 90 PERCENT OF THE CASES. NOSSEIRI, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM A BUSINESS TRIP TO

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EUROPE, SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOME CHANCE MESSAOUD WOULD APPROVE PASSPORTS FOR HIS ENTIRE FAMILY TO TRAVEL ABROAD LATER THIS YEAR (WITH APPROPRIATE PAYMENTS). SUCH AN APPLICATION WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE PAST, HE SAID, AND TOUTAH WOULD NOT EVEN HAVE PERMITTED HIM TO MAKE IT.

5. BOTH TOUTAH AND NOSSEIRI REPORTED NO FURTHER PROGRESS ON THE LIST OF 52 WOMEN. THEY REAFFIRMED ATTITUDE OF MESSAOUD AND ABD AL-SAMAD THAT THIS QUESTION LAY ENTIRELY IN HANDS OF PRESIDENCY AND FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THERE WAS NOTHING THESE SECURITY OFFICIALS COULD OR WOULD DO WITH REGARD TO IT.
PELLETREAU

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